The Department of Rehabilitation Services

Testimony regarding **SB 853**

An Act Concerning Technical and Other Revisions to Statutes Concerning the Department of Rehabilitation Services

February 2013

Chairwoman Slossberg, Chairwoman Abercrombie. Senator Markley, Representative Wood and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee, my name is Amy Porter and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Rehabilitation Services, also known as DORS. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of Senate Bill 853, An Act Concerning Technical and Other Revisions to Statutes Concerning the Department of Rehabilitation Services.

This bill modernizes certain statutory provisions that 1) are not current with federal programmatic provisions, 2) contain dollar amounts that are antiquated and 3) contain terminology that is out-of-date. This bill increases agency efficiency by streamlining agency reporting. The bill also carries over to the DORS Commissioner a provision that allows the DSS Commissioner to promulgate regulations for that agency's programs since DORS now oversees former DSS programs. The bill also updates provisions of the Assistive Technology Revolving Fund, a loan program providing necessary and useful equipment to people with disabilities.

I can summarize the sections in order. **Section 1** removes the dollar cap of nine hundred and sixty dollars for certain rehabilitation services for people who are blind. That dollar cap is over 30 years old and out-of-date. Furthermore, a cap is not necessary as the agency allocates these funds on an as-needed basis only and only within available appropriations. Other language in this section is being removed because it is also out-of-date, for example, the term "partially blind."

Section 2 deletes one of the agency's three reporting requirements as part of our effort to consolidate and streamline reporting. This section also contains a minor technical change.

The **Assistive Technology Revolving Fund** was established in 1992 and **Section 3** reflects changes in federal guidelines since that time, for example, allowing senior citizens and the family members of people with disabilities to borrow from the Fund. In addition, since some loans from the Fund are for projects with longer life spans, such as home modifications, the agency believes it makes sense to lengthen the possible term of the loans from five to ten years.

This will also make those loans more affordable. The bill also permits the agency to charge a rate of up to six percent allowing the agency to grow the Fund modestly over time to keep pace with inflation and demand. The agency will <u>not</u> increase the loan rates for any existing loans.

The Department provides vocational and transition services to schools throughout Connecticut. In fact, we now have an agency liaison assigned to every high school in the state. **Section 4** eliminates a 20-year-old reference to five specific towns and school districts dating from the program's inception as a small, pilot effort. These references are no longer necessary since the program is now statewide. And we believe that these specific references could mislead readers into thinking that only these towns are served.

Section 5 brings together the various and separate reporting requirements that existed before DORS was created and we were still three separate agencies. This proposal would fold those three different reports into one, single report. This move will save staff time for the agency and fits in with the overall legislative push to reduce the total number of government reports where possible.

This section also contains a provision giving the Commissioner the power to adopt regulations relevant to the agency's programs just as the Commissioner of Social Services held that power when our programs were a part of that agency.

Section 6 changes certain dollar thresholds under which the Department may purchase wheel chairs, adaptive equipment and vehicle modifications for its clients in an expedited manner. The greater flexibility provided in this statute is necessary because of the very small and finite number of providers of this type of technology and equipment. The dollar amounts in Section 17b-661 are over 20 years old in two instances and over 30 years old in another. To account for inflation, which is very high in this rapidly advancing area of technology, the thirty-year-old amount of $3,500 is increased to $20,000 and the twenty-year-old amount of $10,000 is increased to $120,000. Finally, the reference to the purchase of actual vehicles is removed since the agency only supports necessary adaptations and modifications made to a vehicle; the client is responsible for the purchase of the actual vehicle itself.

Sections 7, 8 and 9 make technical changes only.

Finally, **Section 10** deletes the remaining two reporting requirements which are in Sections 46a-32 and 17b-655. These reports are all being brought together into one report in Section 5 as I mentioned above.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.